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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5447
SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

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SUBJECT: MORGAN TSVANGIRAI ADDRESSES MEDIA IN BOTSWANA

¶1. Zimbabwe Movement for Democratic Change Leader Morgan Tsvangirai spoke to and took questions from some 50 local and international media December 19 at a hotel in Gaborone. Tsvangirai addressed issues including the abductions of MDC party members in Zimbabwe, the Global Political Agreement, Robert Mugabe's claim that MDC insurgents are being trained in Botswana, mediation by the Southern African Development Community, the cholera epidemic, and his status in Botswana.

¶2. On the status of abducted MDC party members, Tsvangirai said that he could not negotiate while his organization is being violated. He set a date of January 1, 2009 for there to be resolution of the abductions or he could not continue to work with the Robert Mugabe regime.

¶3. Referring to the Global Political Agreement signed September 15 with Robert Mugabe, Tsvangirai said that a partnership must have willingness on both sides for it to work. Mugabe wants to stay in power at all costs and have the MDC as only a junior partner. Zimbabwe has no government, according to Tsvangirai.

¶4. Asked about the South African President's reported assertion that a deal would be struck by the end of this week, Tsvangirai found no basis for this since the necessary change to the Zimbabwe constitution (Amendment 19) to allow for a power-sharing arrangement would require at least a month to go through Parliament.

¶5. Tsvangirai denied Mugabe's claim that MDC insurgents are being trained in Botswana and added that it is not being done anywhere. He also said that South Africa has reported that there is no foundation for the allegation.

¶6. Addressing political mediation by Zimbabwe's neighbors, Tsvangirai called for SADC's continued engagement. While it is said that SADC's role is key to resolving the situation in Zimbabwe, Tsvangirai wondered why more progress had not been made. Answering a question, he later said that he respected the South African President as SADC chair and considered him to be an important influence to resolving the crisis.

¶7. Speaking to the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe, Tsvangirai said that Harare is the center of it and that the MDC-controlled city council could have access to the means to address the outbreak if Mugabe's ZANU-PF party didn't stand in the way.

¶8. Taking a question about his status in Botswana, Tsvangirai noted that he was not a "leader-in-exile" but rather in the country temporarily while he waited for his travel documents. He said that the MDC has no status in Botswana -- it is just a visiting political party from Zimbabwe -- but he asks that Botswana be sympathetic to the plight of Zimbabweans here.

NOLAN